

SALEM HISTORICAL COMMISSION
MINUTES
November 2, 2016

A meeting of the Salem Historical Commission was held on Wednesday, November 2, 2016 at 7:00 pm at 120 Washington Street, Salem, MA. Present were Jessica Herbert (Chair), Kathryn Harper, Laurie Bellin, Reed Cutting, Susan Keenan, Joanne McCrea, and Larry Spang.

14-16 Hodges Court - continuation

Michael Becker submitted an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness for alterations to property, including alterations to windows and fencing and installation of new skylights, door and retaining wall.

Documents & Exhibits

- Applications: October 3, 2016
- Photographs
- Elevation drawings

The applicant Mike Becker was present.

Ms. Kelleher reported that the applicant had submitted revised plans after close of business and she was therefore unable to forward the material to the Commission for their review prior to the meeting.

Mr. Becker presented revised drawings and a letter from an engineer with a preliminary determination that the proposed changes to the site can be built as designed.

Ms. Herbert asked the applicant if he is now proposing reduced excavation at the property.

Mr. Becker replied in the affirmative. He stated that the new proposal would remove less soil but would extend close to the property boundary. The proposed retaining wall would be 18" tall at its highest point and the parking area would now provide 3 non-tandem parking spaces. He presented photographs of existing conditions at the site to demonstrate the proposed changes to the topography.

Ms. Herbert asked for clarification on the proposed layout of the parking spaces.

Mr. Becker indicated on plot plan where parking spaces would be located.

Mr. Spang questioned whether cars would be able to access parking spaces.

Ms. Kelleher stated that there are dimensional requirements for parking spaces and maneuvering aisles but she is not familiar with requirements. She has not been able to provide the building inspector with information to review.

Mr. Spang asked for specific information on proposed landscaping.

Mr. Becker stated that he did not have information with him.

Ms. Herbert asked for specific information on dimensions of site.

Mr. Becker replied that he estimated approximate dimensions of site as 50' deep.

Ms. Bellin asked about the change of the proposed door to a window.

Mr. Becker stated that he is now proposing the opening to be a window and has reduced excavation needs slightly.

Ms. Herbert suggested parking for only two cars via Hodges Court to allow for more landscaping on site.

Mr. Becker stated that this scenario would require less landscaping along Derby Street.

Ms. Herbert replied that landscaping is very important for the site.

Mr. Becker stated that the proposed excavation would allow parking to be lower and less visible.

Ms. Herbert asked for public comment.

Ms. Nancy Corral from 27 Herbert Street expressed the following concerns about the proposed parking area: the need for removal of the entire side yard and landscaping; the resulting aesthetics of a parking area in the yard; erosion concerns; and concerns about impacts from excavation on her property. She also expressed concern about potential environmental hazard from buried oil tanks in the vicinity of Pickering Wharf and asked that the City prepare a report regarding the buried oil tanks. Ms. Corral recommended that the Commission seek to preserve Derby Street as green as it is and respect people who own their houses and not landlords who rent out properties. She noted that absentee property owners have been a major concern on Herbert Street.

There was no additional public comment.

VOTE: Ms. Bellin made a motion to close the public hearing. Mr. Cutting seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion so carried.

Mr. Spang presented a marked-up version of the applicant's plot plan showing parked cars, noting that it appears the maneuvering aisles would be insufficient. Parked cars would be required to back out of area onto Hodges Court.

Mr. Becker refuted Mr. Spang's measurements saying that most cars are smaller than depicted.

Mr. Spang expressed his concern that the proposed large expanse of paving would result in only a small benefit of parking. Mr. Spang also addressed Ms. Corral's concerns, stating that many of her concerns would not fall within the Historical Commission's purview. The Building Inspector would be responsible for reviewing the retaining walls and possible soil erosion.

Ms. Kelleher reported that there are additional levels of review required for the property, including building, zoning, and conservation. She will assist Ms. Corral with information on the levels of review.

Mr. Cutting questioned whether driveways and parking areas should be considered a "built item". He noted that the Town of Marblehead received a legal opinion that parking is a built item and the Commission was able to review parking spaces.

Ms. Kelleher suggested that she could seek a legal opinion about Salem's ordinance in relation to Marblehead's case study.

The Commission discussed previous applications for new parking areas.

Mr. Becker asked if the Commission would even consider the proposal if the legal opinion was favorable.

Mr. Cutting expressed his opinion that the proposal erodes the integrity of the historic district but he is sympathetic to the neighborhood's need for parking. Parking has always been an issue but once the change is made to the property, it is permanent.

Ms. Bellin expressed the challenge of balancing the needs of the neighborhood for more parking against the needs of the City and its historic integrity and tourism.

Ms. Herbert noted that abutting properties have garages with parking.

Ms. Harper noted that the subject house was moved to the site in 1908, which changed the look of the neighborhood. She stated that she would consider parking from Hodges Court for 2 cars if additional landscaping and improvements to fence are made.

Mr. Becker stated that he would improve drainage, improve fence and make other improvements.

Mr. Spang stated that he could only support proposal if there was significant mitigation and improvements to the site. He suggested that improvements be made to the perimeter wall with substantial landscaping incorporated and that the parking area be kept as small as possible. He noted that in his business he is seeing an increasing number of people who no longer own cars but he is not sure whether this is true in Salem.

Mr. Becker stated he is expecting to remove brick from basement floor to use for parking area.

Ms. Bellin asked if possible to have more landscaping along the perimeter of the property and not just along Derby Street.

The Commission discussed whether a gate over the driveway opening could be incorporated and all agreed that it would be impractical.

Mr. Spang expressed his opinion that Derby Street is impacted by extensive pavement which degrades the historic district.

Mr. McCrea and Mr. Cutting both stated that they would consider parking area.

The Commission asked Mr. Becker to present revised drawings showing parking spaces from Hodges Court and asked staff to research whether the Commission can review parking.

VOTE: Ms. Keenan made a motion to continue the application for changes to the existing retaining wall and fence, installation of a new retaining wall, and change to basement windows on the south elevation. Ms. Bellin seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion so carried.

The Commission then discussed request to make changes to basement window on the Hodges Court façade and the proposed skylights.

Mr. Becker presented Photoshop drawings of the proposed basement windows.

Ms. Kelleher presented an image of a 6-light true-divided basement window on a house located in the Washington Square Historic District.

Mr. Becker stated that he would be amenable to installing similar windows.

Ms. Keenan suggested providing applicant with approved type of window.

Mr. Spang suggested that the Commission approve a wood, true-divided 6-light sash with 2x trim and sill.

Mr. Becker proposed that window be 30" wide.

Ms. Herbert suggested that the applicant come back to the Commission with the true dimensions of window opening to be used.

Mr. Becker suggested that a 4-pane sash be used to match the existing 2/2 windows on the house.

The Commission concurred, noting that the windows are not required to meet the stretch code.

VOTE: Ms. McCrea made a motion to continue the application for changes to the Hodges Court façade basement windows. Ms. Bellin seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion so carried.

The Commission then discussed the proposed skylights.

Mr. Becker presented photographs of the slope of the roof and its limited visibility from Derby Street and specifications for the proposed Velux “balcony” skylights.

The Commission discussed the size and operation of the skylights and whether they would be historically appropriate.

Mr. Spang noted that when closed it would be minimally visible but when open, the skylight would be highly visible.

There was not public comment

VOTE: Ms. Bellin made a motion to close the public comment. Ms. McCrea seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion so carried.

Ms. Keenan expressed her support for the proposed skylights.

Mr. Spang expressed his opinion that the proposed skylights are much larger than usually approved by the Commission. He noted that while the skylights would be only nominally visible when closed, they will be highly visible with metal balusters when opened.

Ms. Kelleher suggested that members go to the site to see the property and the proposed changes in person.

Mr. Spang suggested that any skylights approved by the Commission should align with the windows below.

The Commission considered the applicant’s request to reopen existing skylights.

Ms. Herbert asked if existing box would be retained and the new skylight would be a single pane of glass.

Mr. Becker replied in the affirmative, noting that he is proposing to retrofit the existing opening to insert a single pane of glass.

Mr. Spang suggested a Brosco window that could be purchased as single panes that can be installed together. The applicant could then paint frame to match color of slate roof.

VOTE: Ms. Harper made a motion to approve the rebuilding of the two original skylights and to continue the discussion on the proposed new skylights on the rear (west) slope of the roof to the next meeting. Ms. Keenan seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion so carried.

40 Derby Street

Richard and Tina Jodrie submitted an application to approve the replacement of porch railings and the installation of a new stair railing.

Documents & Exhibits

- Applications: October 19, 2016
- Photographs

Ms. Harper recused herself from the discussion as an abutter to an abutter.

Mr. Spang asked who completed the work to the railings.

Ms. Jodrie replied that a contractor was hired to do the work and he was not aware that he needed to match a specific design since he did use wood.

Ms. Herbert asked the Commission on how best to proceed with the violation.

Mr. Spang suggested several approaches: the Commission could ask for the railings to be removed or could ask that additional wood trim be added to improve the appearance of the railing. He expressed concern that there may not be any changes possible that could remedy the design to be more historically appropriate.

Ms. Herbert questioned whether a trim board could be added and the newel posts be removed and something more appropriate be added.

Mr. Cutting and Ms. Bellin expressed their support for remediation.

Ms. Jodrie asked about the fact that newel post is attached to the step that may not allow changes to be made.

Mr. Spang expressed visual concerns about adding trim boards and how they would appear from the street. He noted that it may not be possible to add a trim board under the handrail and adding a new trim board on the bottom of the rail would leave a gap between the boards.

Ms. Bellin asked if the Commission should seek to have the stair railing be changed to match the spacing of the porch railings.

Mr. Cutting suggested that the Commission require the porch railings to be painted, which could improve their appearance.

The Commission discussed having the contractor attend a Commission meeting to discuss the newel posts.

Ms. Kelleher suggested that a Commission member(s) visit the site with the owner and contractor to see if there are any opportunities to improve the design as built.

The Commission asked the applicant to paint the railings and the Commission could then review.

Ms. Jodrie asked if it was possible to stain the porch in a natural finish.

The Commission agreed that the porch railings should be painted or stained to match trim color.

Ms. Bellin asked if the entire porch should be painted.

Mr. Spang suggested that the Commission approve the porch railings and allow them to be painted.

VOTE: Ms. Bellin made a motion to close the public comment. Ms. McCrea seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion so carried.

VOTE: Mr. Spang made a motion to approve the first and second story porch railings as built under a Certificate of Hardship with the condition that the railings be painted or color stained to match the trim color of the house. The discussion of the stair railing, balusters and newel post to be continued to the following meeting in order to identify possible alternative inexpensive design solutions. Ms. McCrea seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion so carried.

Salem Common

The City of Salem submitted an application to install a new historic interpretive sign panel on the Salem Common.

Documents & Exhibits

- Applications: October 17, 2016
- Photographs

Ms. Kelleher presented the proposal.

Ms. Bellin suggested that the sign be oriented to allow viewing of the sites discussed on the marker.

Barbara Schwartz asked about the proposed location and its impact on a proposed sign for the McIntire arch (Washington Arch). She noted that the City had agreed to install a sign at the arch as part of the restoration project.

Mr. Spang presented an aerial view of the Common and suggested that the proposed location of the Common interpretive panel would not be close to the arch.

Ms. Schwartz agreed.

VOTE: Ms. Bellin made a motion to close the public hearing. Mr. Cutting seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion so carried.

Ms. Schwartz identified several inaccuracies on the panel. She will contact Ms. Kelleher to discuss the needed changes. She also questioned whether the panel needs to mention the Washington Arch if a separate interpretive sign will be placed at the arch.

VOTE: Ms. Bellin made a motion to approve the application as presented. Ms. McCrea seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion so carried.

Chestnut Street

The City of Salem submitted an application to install a new historic interpretive sign panel on the northeast corner of Chestnut and Cambridge Streets.

Documents & Exhibits

- Applications: October 17, 2016
- Photographs

Ms. Kelleher presented the application.

Ms. Bellin expressed concern about the proposed location on Chestnut Street, noting that the location was not central to the district and was not central to the sites discussed on the sign. She asked if alternative locations had been considered and suggested locating the panel at the Witch House on Essex Street at the entrance to the district.

Ms. Kelleher noted that another possible location could be the small City park across the street from the Witch House. However, she would need to see if the new panel would interfere with an existing sign for the McIntire Walking Tour in the park.

VOTE: Mr. Bellin made a motion to continue the proposal to the next Commission meeting to identify an alternative site. Ms. McCrea seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion so carried.

Approval of Meeting Minutes for October 19, 2016

VOTE: Ms. Bellin made a motion to approve the minutes of October 19, 2016 with changes noted. Ms. McCrea seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion so carried.

VOTE: Mr. Cutting made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Keenan seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion so carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Patti Kelleher
Community Development Planner